

# Slowdown hasn't hit Glenrock



Workers disassemble one of the power generators during an overhaul project at the Rocky Mountain Power's Dave Johnston Power Plant in Glenrock. The massive maintenance overhaul and expansion project is keeping hundreds of contract employees employed. Photo by Dan Cepeda, Star-Tribune

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GLENROCK -- In August, rooms at the All American Inn were filled with wind farm workers and employees of Cyclone Drilling.

Those workers are gone now. But the rooms remain full.

As construction at the big Rocky Mountain Power wind farm north of town wrapped up and the state rotary rig count dropped, other projects began coming online.

The largest locally are at Rocky Mountain Power's Dave Johnston Power Plant east of town, where emissions control work and a maintenance overhaul on Unit 4 are taking place.

Company spokesman Jeff Hymas said more than 650 contract workers in various crafts are involved in the maintenance overhaul, while about 175 are currently working on emissions control.

Hymas did not provide an exact timeline for the Unit 4 overhaul, but said the installation of new emissions control equipment will occur in stages until 2012.

So far, Glenrock has fared better than many communities at keeping the state's slower economy at bay.

"If anything, it's been an upswing," said Judi Colling, owner of the Hotel Higgins.

With the hotel staying full, the Paisley Shawl Restaurant and adjoining Highlander Bar also benefit, she noted.

In addition, Glenrock could experience an economic benefit from an upcoming 66-turbine Duke Energy Corp. wind project in western Converse County.

But not all wind development in the Glenrock area is coming in big packages. While turbines at Rocky Mountain Power's wind farm generate electricity measured in megawatts, a group of local entrepreneurs is aiming at small users in a kilowatt range.

Scott Gilbert and Mike Colling of WyoWind Energy specialize in wind for residential and agricultural use. Gilbert formerly worked at Glenrock's big wind farm, but stayed in town to help form WyoWind Energy in November.

Historically, ranchers have used windmills, Colling said, and are familiar with wind energy as a concept. So they are good prospects for wind turbines.

But small turbines also could be used by community cooperatives, by developers for entire housing clusters, or even for pumping crude oil out of the ground, he said.

Forty-five years ago, Rocky Mountain Power started mining coal near Glenrock to fuel its power plant, Gilbert said. Now wind turbines sit on the same ground.

That's emblematic of a shifting emphasis to renewable energy, and at the small-user end of the wind spectrum, WyoWind Energy hopes to carve out a niche.

In addition to power projects, Glenrock will soon realize a bump in manufacturing. Construction has started on a 8,640-square-foot building to house A-Square, a maker of large-caliber rifles.

"Getting this business was not only good for economic development providing jobs, but it was a way for us to improve the appearance of one of our entrances into town," Glenrock Mayor Steve Cielinski said in an earlier interview.

A-Square has been operating from temporary quarters with two workers. Within five years, the company is obliged to have 20 full-time employees.

"Our problem is places for people to stay," said town planner Kathy Patceg, "because they end up going to Casper."

As a result, a lot of retail shopping also happens in Casper. "That's kind of sad because we're in a different county and they get all the sales taxes," she said.

But Patceg said there is a new subdivision in the works that will provide moderately priced homes; two models could be available for inspection by summer.

Erlinda Shefelbine judged the economy still strong enough to invest \$350,000 in her new Mabuhay Motel.

"I decided, what the heck, go for it," she said. So far, business has been good.

Patceg said the Commerce Block Building is mostly full, and the town of about 2,200 people could be adding an ice cream shop to its retail repertoire soon.

"I think we're still holding pretty strong," Patceg said. "We've got lots of traffic here. I mean, we actually have to wait at the stop sign sometimes."

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